DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 561 CG 007 269

AUTHOR Heapy, Nelson
TITLE Effects of Nonintellective Student Behaviour Upon Essay Grades.
INSTITUTION University of Western Ontario, London.
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at Canadian Psychological Association, St. John's, Newfoundland, June 3-5, 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Academic Aptitude; *Academic Performance; Achievement Rating; Creativity; *Grade Prediction; *Grades (Scholastic); *Grading; Prediction; Student Evaluation; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Response

ABSTRACT

Two experiments were undertaken to study the effects of nonintellective behavior upon essay grades. In the first experiment teachers were exposed to information depicting a stimulus boy as either aggressive or non-aggressive. Following this information subject marked either a creative or noncreative essay. The subjects consisted of eight teachers employed by two Canadian school districts. The second experiment was essentially the same, except the tidyness of handwriting was varied instead of the aggressiveness of the student's behavior. The subjects consisted of forty teachers employed by two different Canadian school districts. Both experiments suggest that undesirable behavior only biased essay grades if the essay is noncreative. In general, the results suggest that teachers' impressions can influence the grade assigned to an essay. Essays which conform with normative expectations of teachers are of low information value, and the marking of such an essay would be influenced by prior information. (Author/BW)

ED 063561

Effects of Nonintellective Student Behaviour Upon Essay Grades

Nelson Heapy

University of Western Ontario

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Until recently the content of educational research has reflected two predominant concerns. One has been to discover distinctive characteristics which relate to effective or ineffective teaching, while the other has been to discover relationships between the developmental stage of the learner and his readiness for certain kinds of learning. These research trends, unfortunately, have tended to isolate the teacher from the learner in the research literature, and somewhat obscured the importance of unique problems that emerge as a consequence of teacher andpupil interacting. The classroom of course is a very dynamic interactive situation and as such one might expect variables that are more explicitly referenced in the literature of social psychology to be of major importance in influencing the educational process. Findings from one particular area of research in social psychology, that of social perception, seem to be of particular relevance to the classroom situation. Of specific interest is the research in this area which indicates that interactions between persons are mediated to some extent by the impressions the persons form of each other. These findings point to the possibility that the nature of the teachers' interaction with a pupil will be influenced by the impression the teacher forms of the student. They also raise the question as to what will be the consequences for the student of any impression the teacher forms of that student. A study by Gordon and Thomas (1967) is relevant to this concern. These authors found that certain

CG 007 269

behaviour characteristics or styles of kindergarten students influenced teachers' appraisal of their intelligence. It would seem then that the teachers in this study were making inferences about a child's intellectual capabilities from behaviour that was essentially unrelated to the academic task requirements of the classroom. It is of further interest that the particular behavioural style that the teachers felt was indicative of intellectual capability was of a sort that would be valued by teachers inasmuch as it facilitated classroom teaching. There findings point to the possibility that perceived consistency in certain types of desirable and undesirable nonintellectual behaviour of children influences how the teacher evaluates that particular child's intellectual ability or behaviour related to intellectual ability. Such a speculation is particularly interesting in view of the fact that there is correlational evidence offered by Hadley (1954) which shows that those students whose behaviour is most approved of by their teachers attain higher marks on examinations than those students whose behaviour is least approved of by their teachers. Here again approved behaviour was that which facilitated classroom functioning. One explanation of these correlational data might be that children who engage in undesirable behaviour are less intelligent and consequently obtain lower grades. It is doubtful, however, that such an explanation is complete. It has been found (Carter, 1952) that boys, who are typically the object of most disapproval from teachers, score higher on objective achievement tests than girls, yet girls average significantly higher grades than boys on essay type exams. What we have then is the alternative possibility that teachers can be influenced in their assessment of a students academic performance depending upon whether he engages in desirable or undesirable nonintellective be-

haviour. Teachers may give boys lower marks on exams because they have previously engaged in undesirable behaviour. The study to be described consists of two experiment which attempt to determine whether undesirable nonintellective behaviour of a student can affect the grade received on an essay ostensibly written by that student.

Essentially, both experiments depicted a student as engaged in undesirable or desirable behaviour, which was then followed by an opportunity for the teacher subjects to mark an essay attributed to the student. The first experiment varied the aggressiveness of the stimulus students behaviour. Aggressiveness was chosen as an undesirable behaviour because of the interest which has come to be focused on aggressive behaviour since Wickman's 1928 monograph. The second experiment varied the neatness of the essay to be marked. It was felt, largely on intuitive grounds, that untidy headwriters can be an irritating, and consequently undesirable, aspect of marking papers.

The essay that was marked by the teacher was either an extremely creative one or one that was of normative creativity. The creativity of the essay was varied in order to determine whether the influence of prior information on essay grades would be consistent across essay quality.

We will now describe in somewhat more detail the procedure employed in each experiment and the results of each.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for Experiment 1 consisted of 80 teachers employed by the London Public School Board and Middlesex County School Board. The subjects for Experiment 2 consisted of 40 teachers employed by the London Public School Board and St. Thomas Public School Board.

Procedure

Experiment 1. Information about a grade seven boy's behaviour was conveyed to teachers by means of pre-tested films and tape recordings. There were two such film-tape information conditions. One depicted the stimulus boy behaving aggressively in school settings whereas the other condition portrayed the same child behaving in a nonaggressive manner. Twenty teachers were assigned to each information condition. After receving information about the stimulus boy, subjects in each group marked either a creative essay or an essay of normative creativity for a grade seven student. All subjects rated the stimulus boy on 21 bipolar trait scales.

Forty additional subjects repeated essentially the same procedures described above. For these subjects, however, the instructions and deception employed were different. This was done in an attempt to mitigate the possibility of results being interpretable in terms of suspicion of deception (Stricker, Messick, and Jackson, 1969), or demand characteristics.

Experiment 2. This experiment investigated whether neatness of handwriting affected grades given an essay. Subjects were equally divided between a neat writing condition and a messy writing condition. One group marked a neat creative essay and a neat noncreative essay whereas the other group marked a messy creative essay and a messy noncreative essay.

RESULTS

Experiment 1. A 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance was performed on the essay marks (Table 1). Since there were significant F-ratios, post hoc analyses were undertaken. The results can be summarized as follows:

(1) The noncreative essay received lower marks when ostensibly written by an aggressive boy than when attributed to a nonaggressive boy.

(2) The creative essay received consistently high marks in all conditions.

(3) Instructions and deception was not a significant factor.

Experiment 2. The essay marks were analyzed using a 2 x 2 analysis of variance with repeated measures on the creativity factor (Table 2). In general, subjects scored the creative essay higher than noncreative papers. Neat papers were scored significantly higher than messy papers only when the essay was noncreative. These results parallel those of Experiment 1.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of these experiments suggest that teachers' impressions can influence the grade assigned an essay. If a child ostensibly wrote a creative essay, information concerning nonintellective behaviour was not a contributing factor to the grade assigned. The childs behaviour only becomes a factor when the essay was less creative. These findings suggest an interesting model for predicting when prior information regarding nonintellective behaviour about a student will affect teachers' evaluations of intellectual ability. From the point of view of the teacher, an extremely creative essay might be expected to appear atypical compared to the universe of all essays. In terms of the theory of Jones and Davis (1964) this is a sufficient condition for drawing a confident conclusion regarding a childs creative ability. This theory is based on the notion that when a person observes behaviour which has low a priori probability of occurrence he draws more confident inferences based on the behaviour regarding enduring dispositions than if the behaviour had a high base rate. An essay of mediocre creativity would

be expected to have a higher a priori probability of occurrence than a creative one. Inferences regarding creative ability would be made less confidently. The essay is less information rich. It is this situation which would be susceptible to the biasing influence of impressions based upon irrelevant undesirable information. In summary then, essays which conform with normative expectations of teachers are of low information value, and the marking of such an essay would be influenced by prior information. Essays which are disparate with teachers' expectations evoke confident inferences regarding ability, and are not as susceptible to evaluative distortion stemming from irrelevant information.

REFERENCES

Carter, R.S. How invalid are marks assigned by teachers? Journal of Educational Psychology, 1952, 43, 218-228.

Gordon, E.M. & Thomas, A. Children's behavioural style and the teacher's appraisal of their intelligence. Journal of School Psychology, 1967, 5, 292-300.

Hadley, S.T. A school mark - fact or fancy? Educational Administration and Supervision, 1954, 40, 305-312.

Jones, E.E. & Davis, K.E. From acts to dispositions. Advances in experimental social psychology, 1965, 2, 220-297.

Stricker, L.J., Messick, S. & Jackson, D.N. Suspicion of deception: implications for conformity research. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, 5, 379-389.